

# **Gia Truyền (Family Transmission) Texts and their place in Vietnamese Traditional Medicine**

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Vietnamese Gia truyền (family transmission) medical texts consist of prescriptions and medical advice of various sorts that have been handed down from generation to generation within one medical family. In general they are handwritten. They may contain the handwriting of several different healers, or they may have been neatly recopied and organized by someone. In general the text within them concentrates on finding, recognizing, and preparing materia medica and on prescriptions for a number of commonly encountered ailments. In other words they are, in general, devoted to practical advice for treatment rather than to theoretical speculation on the aches, pains, injuries and illnesses of everyday life. Gia truyền do not have a very high reputation in the history of Vietnamese medicine, indeed few of them are listed where important Vietnamese medical texts are discussed. While there are many reasons why any one of these individual books might not have received much scholarly attention, I believe that their low status as a genre of medical texts is connected to the status of those who wrote them and to the status of the script most of them are written in. Most gia truyền are written in Nôm or Hán Nôm rather than in 'pure' Classical Chinese. As they were written by the members of medical families this fact presupposes that very few, if any, of them were produced by members of the elite classes. These are the notebooks of healers on the fringes of the scholar gentry class of late traditional Vietnam. This paper will examine specific examples of gia truyền still extant in Vietnamese archives and will explore the political and social tensions surrounding the usage of different systems of writing in Vietnamese medical texts.